

## **you'd break your heart to make it bigger** by **fomalhault**

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** Denial, Developing Relationship, Dysfunctional Family, Family, Friendship, Hurt/Comfort, Introspection, Multi, Neglect, Panic Attacks, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD, Slow Burn, Trauma, Unhealthy Coping Mechanisms

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Dustin Henderson, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington

**Relationships:** Jonathan Byers/Steve Harrington/Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington & His Kids

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**Summary:**

They can't see him break, can't see him cry, can't see him falter. If this fake idea of him is all they have, and he takes it away, what's left?

Alternatively: there is something wrong with Steve Harrington.

# 1. Chapter 1

## Author's Note:

oh, wow, i love steve harrington, i say, as i plan his endless suffering and pain with a side of comfort alongside my favourite ot3 that is stonathancy, hello

the characters aren't mine (unfortunately), and i don't think the plot is any original, but, hey. what my muse wants, she gets, and she wants me to cry for my soft son, so. here am i. the title comes from Landscape with a Blur of Conquerors, from Richard Siken that is the poet of my life (and i don't really think the meaning i'm going with is more or less what it means in the poem, but, hey)

either way

the mistakes are entirely mine, and english isn't my mother language, which means, please, smash them kindly against my face so i'll be able to improve, thanks ;-;

The first few days go by so fast, Steve barely realizes they're gone — barely notices anything, to be honest. It's like a blanket has been settled over him, numbing the world outside, closing him off from everything. He spends an entire night lying on his bed, curled on his side — the one that doesn't hurt, this is — with his ears ringing and his face still sore. Not sleeping, just — just staring at his closed window, breathing softly through his mouth.

At school, on monday, no one asks where the bruises on his face came from; not that Steve expected them to. Tommy mocks him about not being able to throw a punch to save his life — if he only knew —, Carol ignores his existence, some other barely give him confused looks before eventually shrugging it off. No one really *talks* to him, and Steve's not sure how that makes him feel, if it makes him feel anything at all. Billy Hargrove, thankfully, doesn't look in his direction, doesn't even show up.

Nancy is somewhere, he knows, but she doesn't come for him, and Steve doesn't search for her. There's nothing for them to talk about, anyway — they broke up, and she and Jonathan probably have something going on, and while he said to her it was okay, it's gonna take a while, maybe a long while, before realization fully settles for him, before he feels fine enough with this whole thing so that he won't act like an asshole.

There's the kids, too, and Steve would be lying if he said he's not the least worried about them. And Dustin — Steve *definitely* wants to know how the dipshit is doing. Still, looking up to find them takes more effort than he's physically able to do right now; besides, they're probably up to their own thing right now, what with the Eleven girl apparently coming back from the dead and all — he's gonna have to learn about that one day or another, if they don't mind telling him.

The weekend crawls by slowly. He doesn't do much — takes some painkillers to stop the buzzing in his head and the aching in his ribs, watches TV, reheats some leftover pasta to eat so he doesn't starve to death. The telephone doesn't ring once, and Steve wasn't, he, well. Part of him *had* kind of been expecting someone to call. A major part just wants to lie down in hopes that it'll make the days go faster again, because reality is seeping in and he doesn't *know* what to do with it. Not anymore. He thought he was good at compartmentalizing, after that first time, keeping the bat in his car *just in case* and overall pretending he hadn't been scared to death, but apparently he won't get off the bat so easily this time.

So what, though? So what if he keeps awake at night, jumping at the slightest of sounds, seeing so many monsters in the shadows outside that he's taken to keeping the lights of the house on most of the time? Steve's not a *baby*. He doesn't get to *do* that anymore. Everyone else is dealing just fine, going on with their lives, why can't he do that, too? Why can't he keep his hands from shaking when the dogs outside howl, when the pressure in his chest gets so heavy that for a second he thinks he's going to choke in it?

*He's awesome.* Dustin himself said it. If he's not wrong, at some point Max also probably said he's insane, and, well, yeah, he may be a bit of that, too. But mostly, *this isn't him*. No. Steve fought those fucking aliens from that fucked up upside world or whatever the hell is it's

name. He's had his ass handed to him by stupid Billy Hargrove, and before that, by Jonathan Fucking Byers. He doesn't get to be afraid when the lights start flickering because that's just *stupid*. He's more than that. He should be more than that. King Steve may be mostly a façade, but you take that and then what? What's left? Shitty boyfriend, pretty damn good babysitter? Ha. What a joke. He's emotionally attached, no use denying at this point, but it would be just as useless to say he doesn't know that, had anyone else been available, Dustin wouldn't have asked for his help. The first people that ever put him first, or at least seemed like they did, had been Tommy and Carol, and look how well that turned out. Steve's second best — he knows that. To Nancy and the kids, and even his parents. He's used to it; it doesn't hurt barely as much as it used to.

Still, Steve refuses — he *refuses* godammit — to let that be an excuse to slack off. He's gonna work around it and he's gonna fucking get through this just like he's always done. If it takes having to hide the bills of the house from his parents, biting down his own hand when the nightmares come, sitting in on his bathtub for an entire night with his hands over his ears and the bathroom door locked?

Be it. So fucking *be it*.

(If it doesn't work, if he still thrashes around in his bed and wakes up in cold sweat, if sometimes the mere thought of Billy Hargrove makes him want to double over in pain, if he still pretend the wetness on his face is from sweating so damn much — none of his friends are paying attention too closely, are they? Steve will be *fine*. On top of everything else, they don't need to deal with his bullshit, too.)

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

i have no idea what i'm doing but i hope y'all had fun, i guess?  
see you guys next week ;-;

## 2. Chapter 2

### Notes for the Chapter:

are we going to ignore the fact that everyone in this show is probably traumatised to some degree? no.  
are we going to address that just now? also no.

i have a lot of things i want to say about this chapter,  
but i think it's better if i leave it to the end notes,  
so... have a fun, i guess? :D

Nancy doesn't *regret* being with Jonathan. No, she could never regret that. She loves him, she 's in love with him, and has been for a while. No amount of denying could ever numb the fondness that assaults her when she sees him, the spark his touch brings her, the pleasurable burning at her core when their eyes meet.

No. She doesn't regret being with Jonathan. What she *does* regret, however, is how she went about it with Steve. They haven't talked, not really, and Nancy can't erase of her head the way he looked when he told her it was okay. When he told her about being a shitty boyfriend – and gods why didn't she deny it? They've had their disagreements, their problems, and some things she doesn't think they ever did get around nicely, but he wasn't shitty, no. He was sweet and caring, and he liked making her laugh, he liked letting her know that she was loved, that he loved her. He tried to atone for his mistakes with her, with Jonathan, she knows he did, that he tried to be decent about it – and if Jonathan never reached out, that was his call to make, not Steve's, and Steve *knew that*, he respected that, that line, the space, because some things you can never take back, no matter how much you wish you could. It was the same with her, when they talked about the whole "slut Wheeler" thing.

He wasn't a shitty boyfriend, not really, but when he spoke it aloud, when he said it, Nancy didn't disagree. He told her it was okay, that it really was, but she doesn't think it's true – it hadn't been then, and it isn't now. They didn't *talk* about breaking up. She just *assumed*. He told her everything she said to him the night before, and the only thing he asked was for her to prove it wrong after *she* said it was all

wrong. And she couldn't. She couldn't say to his face that she loved him, because she was confused, she was sad, she, she doesn't know, she was *angry* – angry about *everything*. About Barb and the fact that Steve kept trying to protect her when she didn't need him to, and that she kept having those, those *feelings* whenever she and Jonathan talked and then Steve had put her against the metaphorical wall to demand her answers *she didn't have*. Or didn't want to have, it doesn't really matter at this point.

When he went away, when he stepped back to go to the court play basketball with his colleagues, Nancy just assumed it meant everything was over, their relationship, that they were over – but the way he stared at her that night broke her heart.

She didn't think about how all of it affected him. The whole Barb thing, the monster. Nancy didn't ask because it seemed like he was content in pretending it had never happened, and, again, *she just assumed*. But when he looked at her like she never did anything wrong, like she didn't make him angry and sad and *hurt*, like she didn't go around spouting to his face that he was bullshit, that their entire relationship was bullshit – that, that was the moment Nancy really thought *I fucked up*.

The worst part? They didn't have *time* to talk things through. Jonathan was taking Joyce and Will away, and he *needed* her, and the world was ending, *again*. And when it was done, when Will was finally safe and the gate was closed, *it slipped her mind*. Not her proudest moment, Nancy isn't ashamed to admit, but – she was just so *relieved*. She was just so happy it was finally over, hopefully forever this time, and so *tired* after the emotionally draining experience of watching a boy as young as her own brother have to fight for his life and be *exorcised*. When they came back, Steve's absence from the Byers house didn't seem like *such* a big deal. Eleven was back, Mike was happy, Will was safe – she huddled up alongside Jonathan on the sofa and promptly passed out.

The morning after, when she heard about what happened – Billy, and the fight, and them going to the tunnels –, she felt guilty. She felt guilty because while she slept on Jonathan's embrace, dead to the world, Steve had to spend an entire night at the hospital with no one but police chief Jim Hopper; they couldn't contact his parents, and

the rest of his family lived far enough that it wouldn't matter if the could come or not.

Now, it's not like she doesn't like Hopper, or that she thinks Steve doesn't; it's just – it's Steve. She *knows* Steve, she knows how he gets when he's not feeling well, and there's no way he asked for Hopper play with his hair while snuggling on his arm.

*Nancy should've been there.* Not as his ex-girlfriend, but as his *friend*. She was the only one to know his parents would be out of town until the end of the month, and that there was no one else that could help, that there was no one else Steve would want to call.

*Mild concussion*, Hopper had told them when he came for Eleven. Steve would need to rest for a while, not do any extraneous activity – but he would be fine. The bruises on his face would take a while longer to heal, the cut on his temple had needed to be stitched back together and *that would probably leave a scar. But he would be fine.*

(Nancy knows it won't be fine. When the weekend passes by and she can't make herself pick up the phone to call him. When school comes and the bruises color a black, blue and purple nightmare on Steve's face, and she spends the entire first period crying in a bathroom stall – she knows.)

Jonathan knows Nancy is struggling. He knows she feels guilty, and that she's been meaning to talk to Steve since that morning with Hopper – that every day she tells herself "I'm doing this today" just to turn the other way when the bruises still on Steve's face make her insides churn.

After his own mother, Nancy Wheeler is the bravest woman Jonathan has ever known. But she's not good at – at this. At facing up her own fears. Shooting monsters? Easy peasy. Handling her own struggles, her survivor's guilt, the metaphorical ghosts that haunt her – not so much. Jonathan understands her, to some degree. He, too, isn't any

good at dealing with his feelings. And therein lies his current problem: *he has no idea how to help her*. He's not feeling guilty. His brother is safe, his family is safe, everyone is *just fine*. And he's not saying this because it's *Steve Harrington*, of all people, that is the reason why his girlfriend's shoulders are hunched in shame. No, that's not a problem – he may not be falling head over heels for the guy, but he doesn't *hate* Steve, not anymore.

Jonathan just doesn't understand *why*. Why is Nancy feeling so guilty? Shit happens. Shit is *always* happening in this god forsaken city, which is not saying the entire situation doesn't suck. Why would anyone blame her for not immediately asking about Steve and promptly rushing to the hospital after him? What would she even do, anyway, besides sitting there and – oh.

*Oh.*

(Jonathan remembers being seven. He remembers crying from a broken arm after a few kids in school shoved him around for fun. How he had wanted that for one night mom didn't have to work 'til so late, that for one moment dad could at least pretend he cared enough to be there with him. More than that, he remembers how lonely it felt that the nurses kept taking turns at staying with him after he said his mom was working and he had no idea where his dad was. It was one of the worst nights of his entire life.)

➤

“I think you should talk to him.”

“... Jonathan?”

“Steve. I think you two should talk.”

“I-”

“It's okay, Nancy. I understand.”

(He really does.)

**Notes for the Chapter:**

oKAY SO here i go

first things first, i don't know if you guys realized, but steve and nancy focus on different things on both their narrations, and so does jonathan. i want to have that highlighted because they're different characters, they think differently, and they prioritize different things.

also, i have quite the rambling i've been doing with my friends (and my sister, bless her for not ignoring me even though i know she wants to :p) since i finished season 2:::::::what the actual fuck was that messy break up thing, guys? i mean, really?? rEALLY??? i loved nancy in season 1. i adored her. she and joyce were the female characters i had ever wanted in a show. and then they do the whole thing with steve, and??? i got really mad??

now, don't misunderstand me. it doesn't bother me that she ended up with jonathan, what bothers me is how her relationship with steve was dealt with. i mean, did you guys realize that steve's character was only developed after they fought? that he apparently became one of the fans' favorite *just after their relationship was over*? that it's easy to vilify nancy in this situation because female characters are always judged for leaving "the good guy" for someone else?

*again:* it's not that i don't support nancy loving whomever the hell she loves, and following her heart and all that thing. what i don't support is the whole "friendzone" idea that "no matter what amazing thing this one guy does, the girl is always choosing the other one".

there's also the whole mess about just assuming things instead of talking it through, and like??? ugh, i hate this kind of thing. if after that scene when nancy and steve fought and he went away someone had at least told the other "look, we will talk about

this *later*, preferably when none of us is mad" or "i think we should give each other some space", i don't think i would've been so bitter about the whole thing.

(yes, i get really emotional™ about fictional characters, don't judge me)

anyway, i also wanted to thank you guys for the comments in the last chapter, the kudos and the bookmarks :D i'll try to update this weekly, but it depends mostly on my muse, i guess?  
either way, see you guys some other day \o